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RECOLLECTIONS OF A SOVIET DIPLOMAT

IX. The Soviets and the United States

The Amtorg, of the board of directors of which I became a member, is a private commercial company which operates in the United States according to the local laws.

An attempt had been made to obtain authorisation in the United States to set up a semi-official Soviet agency; after a categorical refusal, opposed by Washington, recourse was had to a subterfuge: a joint stock company with officials of the commissariat, who became shareholders and certain American citizens - Russians who had emigrated long before and were established in the United States--who would give the enterprise a sufficiently acceptable aspect for the local authorities. Shares were issued which were, of course, paid for by the commissariat and the Amtorg - the American Trading Corporation - became a non-official agency of the Soviets in New York. American visas being very difficult to obtain, the majority of the officials of the Amtorg were enrolled on the spot and only the chiefs of divisions were sent from Moscow. Everyone was, however, appointed by orders signed by the commissariat of commerce, these orders being styled secret, but the least important usher of the commissariat knew what to believe.

Only the most tried members of the Party were appointed division chiefs of the Amtorg, for they were to become  
owners

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owners of a rather large block of stock. As a matter of fact, these shares were never delivered to them in kind, the president alone being charged with keeping them; but, legally, each division chief had the right to require that these shares be transmitted to him. A little later, the Political Bureau instituted a precautionary measure: at the time of being sent to the United States, the future division chief had to sign or accept drafts for an amount double the capital represented by his "shares". But in 1926, that had not yet been thought of.

In order to go to the United States, the official in question was depicted as being the representative of a Soviet organization needing to place a large order with American manufacturers. Thus, in my case, I shamelessly pretended that the Gostorg, another Soviet organization, was prepared to purchase, through me, 10,000 American tractors, perhaps even more. Such a large order was to dazzle the American consuls and secure for me a visa for at least twelve months. Upon my arrival in New York, another million dollars worth of stock was to be issued which I would pay for from my "own funds": after which, I would have the extension of my visa. They had even thought, at the Political Bureau, of appointing me semi-official agent of the Soviets in the United States; this post, moreover, does exist and it is held by a certain Svirsky, who arrived in Washington in 1922 as the representative of an operetta republic (of the Far East); since then, he has remained as an observer, without having any influence either at Moscow or at Washington; from time to

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to time, he publishes a small informative leaflet, relating how he went to see this or that American statesman to discuss the subject of the possible recognition of the Soviets.

In 1926, the Political Bureau decided to make the work in the United States more effective. Certain members of the Political Bureau agreed with Trotsky. He claimed that the antagonism between Europe and the United States was going to increase <sup>and</sup> that that, in order to weaken Europe, Uncle Sam might, perhaps, need to inoculate it a little more with bolshevism, as Ludendorff had previously tried in his relations with the Entente, which he had wished to hold in check with the Bolshevik spectre.

It was accordingly decided to appear exceedingly accommodating to Washington, to pay the American debt, to give complete compensation for nationalised American property and to offer Americans the best Russian concessions.

The Commissariat of Foreign Affairs had indeed tried to protest, saying that other countries would endeavor to take advantage of the precedent created by such an agreement with America, but the Political Bureau replied to these arguments with smiles. The watchword on this subject was as follows: "Recognized de jure by the United States, we can dispense with the rest of Europe. Having the United States on our side, politically and economically, we can risk a diplomatic break with all the rest of the world." This idea always seemed infantile to me.

But, in 1926, the illusions on the subject of the United States were still very great, and Moscow decided to entrust

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entrust a diplomatic task to me, putting Svirsky under my orders.

In order to meet this new situation, I had to become acquainted with the political work carried on in the United States.

Piatnitsky, one of the members of the Komintern, that is, of the executive committee of the Third International, told me that the work of the Komintern in the United States was hindered by the impossibility of establishing a sufficiently powerful communist party there. To be sure, they were sending directions and a great deal of money, but they were still far from an impressive mass movement. In 1935, the American Communists had allowed several good opportunities to escape them: the agitation of the discontented farmers, the presidential campaign and everything relating to the blacks.

We know, Piatnitsky repeated, that it is not easy to organize the work in that Republic. American workers are reluctant to enter the ranks of a clearly proletarian party. The Federation of Labor has enormous influence in the United States....

"The unemployed are not affected by our propaganda. The subsidies paid annually amount to \$100,000, however, which is not little for a party having, in all, barely a few thousand members. The Profintern (Trade Union International), for its part, sends \$25,000 to the Trade Union Propaganda League. Now, when, for example we ask them to make a small demonstration to protest - let us say against the imperialism of the United States in South America

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America - they are fundamentally incapable of drawing a large enough crowd into the streets. As for a strike of protest, it must not even be thought of!

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Mr. Bessedovsky for the whole world)

(Continuation)

"For these reasons, the Komintern has decided to send two energetic comrades to the United States, charged with directing the Party and the League at the same time. They are two Germans, so that if they should happen to be caught, Moscow could not be accused of having fomented disorders. They are named Wagner and Neumann.

"The American Communists are subsidized through our agency at Berlin. If need should be felt, you could advance these two comrades sums of \$10,000 as a maximum, on the credit of the funds of the Amtorg. These amounts will be returned to you by Berlin. The amounts advanced by the Amtorg would be charged to the personal account of the President of the Amtorg and the money sent from Berlin would be credited to him. In America, everything is seen on a large scale, and some ten thousand dollars lent to your president should not disturb your financial comptrollership. It is for proletarians that that is a great deal of money."

I also had a talk with the chief of military espionage, Bersine. He explained to me that two illegal organizations were working in the United States, with their center of  
action

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action at New York. Their purpose was technical, military and naval espionage. The head of these two organizations was named Filin (pseudonym: Semen). Provided with a Polish passport, he is said to be one of the best Soviet spies. He is said to pass for the owner of a small office for the importation of medicinal herbs, particularly what the English call licorice, regliase. In this way, he can, from time to time, appear in the offices of the Amtorg and there meet the representatives of the division of military technical orders.

Lastly, I had an interview with Trilisser, chief of the foreign department of the G.P.U. (State Political Administration). The G.P.U., because of lack of money, could not develop any extensive action in the United States, and its role was limited in particular to supervision of the officials of the Amtorg. A certain Gordon (I do not know whether he went to the United States under his real name) is at the head of this organization: he represents himself as clerk of the Amtorg. Formerly chief of one of the sections of the central committee of the party, Gordon enjoys great influence at Moscow, particularly with Molotov.

There also exists a small nucleus of political espionage, the head of which is the Latvian Alxnis, an official of the G.P.U., who arrived in the United States with a Latvian passport, I no longer remember under what name.

To guarantee the transmission of information coming from this organization, there is now under consideration the matter of sending to the United States another official of the G.P.U., Dr. Scheftel, who would be presented as a  
representative

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representative of the Soviet Red Cross. The expenses of the G.P.U. in the United States are said not to exceed 50,000 dollars a year.

After a stay of two weeks, I left for the United States. The visa was to be given me at the American Consulate at Riga. I was received there in a friendly manner and turned over to Mr. Martens, counsellor of the mission, who spoke Russian very well. Mr. Martens carefully examined my papers and the full power of the Gestorg authorizing me to purchase 20,000 tractors in the United States. Then he told me that, according to his information, I had been appointed the semi-official representative of the U.S.S.R. in the United States, which made it impossible for him to give me a visa, for the United States was not in need of a diplomatic representative of the Soviets.

Such was the end of that enterprise. The Amtorg protested to Washington, but the Department of State confirmed the decision of its representative at Riga.

Some time after this incident, the Department of State refused to visa the passports of Miatakeff and Sokolnikoff (now ambassador at London) who were also to represent the Soviets semi-officially in the United States.

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